

Thinking Like a Watershed

Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

FALL 2022

PFAS Found in Water Samples and Fish in Black Earth Creek

Andy Morton (BECWA)

P FAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), often called “forever chemicals” are found in a variety of products such as non-stick cookware, food wrappers, stain-resistant sprays and certain types of firefighting foams that, unfortunately, are increasingly found in our natural environment. Health risks may increase when fish with high levels of PFAS are consumed. These risks can include increased cholesterol levels, decreased immune response and decreased fertility in women, among other health effects.

In March 2022, The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Health Services (DHS) issued a PFAS-based fish consumption advisory for brown trout caught in Black Earth Creek from the headwaters to the confluence with Blue Mounds Creek in Dane County. Brown trout sampled from Black Earth Creek near Cross Plains had elevated levels of PFOS, which is a type of PFAS. Consequently, the DNR and DHS recommended consuming no more than one meal per week for brown trout harvested from Black Earth Creek. Surface water samples were taken at the same time at 5 sites from Middleton to the Village of Black Earth and had detectable, although low levels of PFAS.

This brown trout consumption advisory was issued following results of fish sampling conducted in 2020. Brown trout were sampled again in 2021, but contrary to the 2020 results, the average PFOS concentration was below fish advisory limits. Additional sampling is ongoing for the summer/fall 2022 of fish tissue and surface water of Black Earth Creek, and the results will be released by WDNR/DHS after the samples are analyzed and verified.

The following website includes an interactive map of all surface water sites that have been sampled for PFAS by the DNR since 2019. Zoom in to find BEC, and click on the symbols to see PFOS and PFOA results.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS/Impacts.html>

Save the Date: On November 1, 2022, BECWA will be sponsoring an informational event to provide an update on the PFAS situation in the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Topics to be included are: source determination, monitoring results and remediation. Details about this meeting will be available on our website www.becwa.org



Brown Trout Photo: Dennis Franke

Please see the following website for additional information:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS>

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/chemical/pfas.htm>



**Black Earth Creek
Watershed
Association**

www.BECWA.ORG

For the wise management of the land and water resources in the Black Earth Creek Watershed.

BECWA Goals

- To protect, conserve, support and advocate for the wise, long term management of the physical, biological, environmental, cultural and historical resources that constitute the heritage and future of the watershed.
- To foster and encourage citizen and locally-based stewardship among the many members of the Watershed community.
- To provide a forum for civilized discussion of issues and problems in the Watershed.

Board of Directors

- Bobbi Peckarsky - Vice-Chair & Acting Chair
Steve Born - Past Chair
Barbara Born - Secretary & Past Chair
David Lucey - Treasurer
Johnny Armstrong - Website Manager
Kate Beardmore, Mary Devitt, Andy Morton, Debra Weitzel

Deborah Nemeth - Newsletter Design
Bobbi Peckarsky - Newsletter Editor

**Special thanks to the folks who supported the
Middleton High School Video Project**

We thank William Boehm (Middleton High School), Mike Rupiper (Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission), Dennis Franke (Trout Unlimited), Bobbi Peckarsky (BECWA), Mary Devitt (BECWA), Chris Long (Gateway to the Driftless), Fred Wolf (Wolf Run), Sara Shackleton (Wolf Run), Kim Kuber (Wisconsin DNR), and Gary and Gaila Olsen for their participation, support and assistance in this project.

See story on back page.

Membership

We hope you enjoy reading the BECWA newsletter. It is our pleasure to share news and information from the watershed.

If you are not already a member - please join today! To become a BECWA member go to <https://www.becwa.org/join-becwa> and fill out a form to mail with a check or donate online.

If you choose to send a check please mail to:

BECWA
PO Box 164
Cross Plains, WI 53528

If you are already a member, renew today by going to <https://www.becwa.org/join-becwa>

- Lifetime Member - \$100
Business - \$50
Watershed Patron - \$35
Household - \$25

***Help us continue this important work!
We appreciate your support.***

**BECWA would like to recognize the following
donors who have supported our organization
between 2019 and 2022**

- Mary Ambalnic
Johnny Armstrong
Steve Born
Barbara Borns
Kathy Brock
Robert Dunnagan
Gateway to the Driftless
Gilbert Herman Jr
Greg Hyer
David Lucey
Mad City Paddlers
Gary and Gaila Olsen
Bobbi Peckarsky and Steve Horn
Gail Sklodowska
Thank you!

BECWA, Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission and Trout Unlimited Team Up for 2022 Trout Days Celebration

Andy Morton (BECWA) and Tom Thrall (Trout Unlimited)

The Black Earth Creek Watershed Association (BECWA), Capitol Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC), and the Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) teamed up this year on Saturday, May 7, 2022, for the annual “Trout Days” celebration in Zander Park, Village of Cross Plains. BECWA board member Mary Devitt was on hand to talk about the mission of BECWA and discussed opportunities for involvement with many participants who signed up to receive more information about our organization. The “Bugs on the Creek” demo was conducted by Bobbi Peckarsky as in past years and had many visitors. This activity was extended over the scheduled time thanks to Andy Morton, because new people kept arriving to check it out. Mike Rupiper (CARPC Deputy Director) provided info on the Green Infrastructure Plan to visitors and how to safeguard properties adjacent to Black Earth Creek against flooding and protect water quality of the creek. Tom Thrall (TU Board Member) organized the Trout Unlimited involvement, with several TU members conducting a fly casting class, lessons on “reading the water,” offering tips on equipment, and a session on “knots you need to know”. On a beautiful Saturday, this event drew in excess of 30 attendees. All in all, it was a great success and we hope to repeat this collaborative effort in 2023. Our thanks to the Village of Cross Plains and the Cross Plains Lions for providing the opportunity and infrastructure to make it possible.

Photos: James Beecher



“Bugs by the Creek” with Bobbi Peckarsky



Hands on fly-casting instruction by TU members

News Briefs

Black Earth Creek Watershed Green Infrastructure Plan Update

Mike Rupiper (CARPC)

BECWA has been collaborating with the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC), communities along Black Earth Creek, a consulting team, and a steering committee of other organizations active in the watershed to develop a green infrastructure plan. The goal of this project is to develop specific strategies that will provide a quantifiable level of flood protection to communities, water quality benefits to Black Earth Creek and its tributaries, and recreational, economic, and ecological benefits to the watershed as a whole. Wisconsin Emergency Management approval of the plan is expected this month. Ideas and assistance from BECWA members on engaging the watershed community to implement the plan are also welcome. BECWA members are encouraged to view the Executive Summary of the plan and other information on the project website at: <https://becw-gi-carpc.hub.arcgis.com/>

CHC Battle Far From Over

Chuck Tenneson (DALC) and Bobbi Peckarsky (BECWA)

Even before constructing a single tower, irreparable environmental damage is already occurring in our watershed caused by clear-cutting the riparian zone of the headwaters of Black Earth Creek in preparation for the Cardinal-Hickory Creek transmission line. Complete destruction of the vegetated riparian zone leaving no vegetative buffer of such a valuable cold-water trout stream will fundamentally and irreparably alter the conditions for all organisms living in the stream. Removal of riparian vegetation reduces in-stream habitat heterogeneity needed for healthy fish populations. The lack of shade will increase water temperatures, reducing oxygen levels necessary to support healthy insect populations and the fish that feed on them. Lack of shade will also favor proliferation of algal blooms that are stimulated by warmer temperatures. Removal of streamside vegetation also destabilizes the stream banks, and even smaller precipitation events will result in erosion of fine sediments into the stream, which covers preferred habitats for both invertebrates and fish. Eroded sediments will be carried downstream to cause deterioration of the sections of stream used by avid anglers who come from far and wide to catch brown trout.

Watching the 18-story tall CHC towers rising across the Driftless landscape, one could easily assume that the battles over this controversial project are over. Despite glaring habitat destruction underway by ATC, this project is far from a “done-deal.” Legal challenges initiated by Driftless Area Land Conservancy, other environmental groups and by both Iowa and Dane Counties are in full swing. Here’s an update:

Federal Court - In January, Judge William Conley blocked the project from crossing the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. Nevertheless, the developers - American Transmission Co. (ATC), ITC Midwest, and Dairyland Power Co-op – have continued building two line segments, one in Iowa another in the Black Earth Creek Watershed in Wisconsin. The fact that they have no legally permitted means to join the two segments results in what Judge Conley characterized as “little more than an orchestrated train wreck at some later point in this lawsuit.” The developers have appealed his ruling to the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago. For CHC opponents, the exceptional legal team at the Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC) will present oral arguments in support of Judge Conley’s ruling on Sept. 28, 2022. The public can attend in person or to follow via YouTube. Details about livestreaming will be posted on the the court’s website and the DALC website: <https://www.driftlessconservancy.org/>

State Court - The state court case focuses primarily on issues concerning the initial approval of the project and route. This case has been delayed two years because of the appeal by the developers to the Wisconsin Supreme Court concerning an issue related to potential appearance of bias by former Public Service Commissioner Huebsch. With that issue settled, we anticipate that the court will schedule oral arguments soon.

Opponents of the project, including BECWA, continue in the conviction that there are less expensive and less environmentally damaging ways to reduce carbon emissions and to provide reliable, economical energy to Wisconsin and the upper Midwest.



Photo of destruction of the riparian zone of the headwaters of BEC – Bobbi Peckarsky

A Local Gem Shines Brighter

David Lucey (BECWA)



Photo: Dave Lucey

Among the treasured water features in the Black Earth Creek Watershed, Salmo Pond has provided enjoyment for many over the decades. Thanks to recent activities, this gem of the watershed has undergone several improvements making it more appealing to both the resident fish and the visiting people.

Unlike the nearby Black Earth Creek, Salmo Pond, located near the intersection of Highway 14 and Scherbel Road west of Cross Plains, is not a naturally occurring body of water. Long time area resident, Bob Boehnen, remembers when this area was a corn field in the late 1940's or early 1950's. His uncle, Engel Boehnen, removed the sand and gravel below the soil surface, and the area was subsequently excavated to its current size by H. A. Raemisch Construction of Middleton. The pond, then called Raemisch Pond, was acquired by the DNR in 1961 and renamed Salmo Pond. Salmo is a genus of fish that includes salmon and brown trout. The pond is fed by underground springs that eventually flow into Black Earth Creek at its western end. It has become a popular spot for fishing, swimming, and exercise with a walking path around the pond perimeter. It has been managed by Dane County Parks since 1980.

Dane County has recently made several upgrades to Salmo Pond to improve the water quality of both the pond and Black Earth Creek. A modern vault toilet has replaced the primitive one that was located in the pines. Paved walking trails make it possible for easy access, including wheelchairs, to several fishing platforms. The new parking lot now drains toward two stormwater basins, preventing warm water from running off into the pond and the creek.

The Friends of Festge volunteers assisted Dane County by planting 1700 rain garden plants in the stormwater basins to promote absorption and drainage. They also completed a project started 10 years ago by clearing the remaining 300 feet of Salmo Pond shoreline. All invasive plants have been removed and the banks have been planted with native prairie grasses and forbs. Several large trees were dropped on the ice last winter and allowed to settle to the bottom of the pond where they will provide shelter for fish. Fishermen can now access the pond from almost any point around the perimeter, which was not possible for decades. Be sure to stop for a visit or enjoy the picturesque, calming environment as you pass by.

Recognizing the contributions of former BECWA Board Members

Steve Born (*BECWA*)

The success of small non-governmental watershed organizations like BECWA depends on the vision, leadership, and commitment of their Board members. We have always been able to survive and thrive because of the dedicated volunteers that have served on the Board. Two such stalwarts who have recently rotated off the Board are Greg Hyer and Chris Long.



Greg Hyer was a Board member for 16 years (2006-2021), serving as Chair for 11 years (2010-2021). Greg came to the Board understanding that resource protection and conservation require patience, persistence, effort and time. He provided leadership for BECWA to educate watershed residents about the uniqueness and value to the community of Black Earth Creek. He strengthened the role of BECWA to support all levels of government to maintain the exceptional quality of this spring creek under intense development pressures and competing needs for programs and funding. Under his watch, BECWA convened an informational forum following the 2018 flooding in the watershed, and supported the Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (CARPC) report on how to mitigate future

Reflecting on his years on the BECWA Board, he highlights the roles of people: “BECWA has attracted long time, loyal supporters and high quality folks with scientific and technical background in biology, water quality, planning and public administration to do its work. These Board members and supporters give it the credibility to be listened to and heard”.

Chris Long joined BECWA in 2013 and served 8 years on the Board of Directors, as a conservation-minded angler and longtime Trout Unlimited member attracted to the idea of a watershed-level stewardship organization. His contributions to BECWA illustrate the diverse roles Board members can play in support of our mission. For example, Chris served as informal liaison between the lower watershed community and the villages of Mazo and Black Earth for sharing project news and other relevant information; and assisted with educational and marketing communications. He coordinated updating the BECWA logo and producing marketing materials -- bumper stickers, refrigerator magnets, and signage. He also helped develop media outreach and event publicity, and facilitated growth



of strategic partnerships between BECWA and the valley business community, which in time led to development of the Gateway to the Driftless regional marketing effort. These initiatives converged in the community informational meeting BECWA and partners hosted after the 2018 floods, creating a basis for broad community participation in the CARPC Green Infrastructure project.

While Greg and Chris have moved on to other community and conservation endeavors, they continue to be ardent supporters of BECWA and our watershed. We deeply appreciate their energy and efforts, and look forward to recruiting “new blood” on the BECWA Board of Directors that will continue the good stewardship efforts so important for the future health of this special place.

Sustain Dane hosts gathering in the Black Earth Creek Watershed

Barbara Borns (BECWA)

Sustain Dane, a Dane County organization (www.sustaindane.org), hosted a gathering on June 15, 2022 to encourage connections and reciprocal involvement between their organization and local environmental groups. Steve Whayland, chair of the Board of Directors, and Lucia Hunt, partnerships manager, welcomed representatives from local organizations as well as Dane County officials to the Vessel Café adjacent to Black Earth Creek in Cross Plains.

In an effort to expand their activities beyond Madison, Sustain Dane representatives have been meeting with organizations throughout the county to achieve more regional goals consistent with their mission to serve Dane County as a whole. They chose this location for a networking event because Black Earth Creek is an important part of the environmental health of Dane County. Financial support was provided by Ho-Chunk Gaming-Madison, and Crystal and Shaun of the Vessel Café prepared a tasty supper.

The following representatives presented brief descriptions of the roles of their organizations in stewarding the health of the Black Earth Creek Watershed:

- Melissa Gavin, Village of Cross Plains Sustainability Committee and resident of Cross Plains, convinced the Village Board to create a new ad hoc Sustainability Committee. (www.cross-plains.wi.us)
- Ben Swanson, Gateway to the Driftless (www.gatewaytothedriftless.com), State Bank of Cross Plains and Cross Plains Ambassador, whose family inspired and manages the Swamplover's property.
- Amy Lord, Outreach and Education Manager for the Ice Age Trail Alliance (www.iceagetrail.org), whose national headquarters are the Village of Cross Plains and provides local information to Trail hikers.
- Crystal and Shaun, owners of the host restaurant (www.vesselcafecp.com), described their decision to

relocate to Cross Plains adjacent to Black Earth Creek and their commitment to good stewardship of the watershed.

- Mike Rupiper from Capital Area Regional Planning Commission (www.capitalarearpc.org), Director of Environmental Resources Planning for Dane County, emphasized the important role local groups play in regional planning.

- Mary Devitt and Dave Lucey, members of the BECWA Board of Directors (www.becwa.org), explained our organization's 34 year history advocating for the health of the creek and the watershed, beginning with the crisis in 1988 of toxins leaking from Hideaway Land Fill at the headwaters of BEC.

- Nancy Kalsow, of Kalsow Coaching and Consulting (www.kalsowcoach.com), lifelong resident of the Zander Farm in the Black Earth Creek watershed, helps "maintain our resources and viability for future generations".

- Janet Silbernagel Balster created SilverNail Studio for Geodesign (www.silvernailgeodesign.com) in the BEC watershed, provides interactive landscape design and mapping strategies that engage community members in reaching their place-based goals.

Unfortunately, a walking tour along Black Earth Creek following the presentations was cancelled when tornado warnings and heavy rains washed across the watershed. Nonetheless, the event was declared a success by fostering future collaborations among participating organizations





Black Earth Creek Watershed Association

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BECWA partners with Middleton High School Video Project

Andy Morton (*BECWA*)

The Middleton High School Advanced Video Editing Class, in cooperation with the Black Earth Creek Watershed Association (BECWA), produced several videos highlighting the outstanding values of the Black Earth Creek Watershed and its environmental issues. This video project was a key part of the public engagement efforts of BECWA and was supported by WDNR River Planning Grant awarded to BECWA. The videos are available for viewing on the BECWA website (www.becwa.org).

Seven advanced students participated in planning the video production, received hands on training from media and resource professionals, conducted interviews both in the field and the studio, did their own video editing, and produced the final videos. The students, with support from their teacher, William Boehm, gained invaluable experience working on this project and provided important community service through their efforts.

According to the teacher:

“This project was a great partnership between Black Earth Creek Watershed Association and Middleton High School. This was a valuable experience for the students to work alongside industry professionals. The students were able to learn, communicate and collaborate alongside industry professionals to create high quality professional videos. The 21st Century Skills demonstrated in this project are adaptable throughout all careers. I am excited for continued collaboration between BECWA and Middleton High School.”

See special thank yous on Page 2.
